

Larkin's second book

VANGUARD OF EMPIRE: MISSOURI'S CENTURY OF EXPANSION, by Lew Larkin, (310 pages; State Publishing Co., St. Louis; \$6).

By Glenn E. Davis, B.J. '51, A.M. '59

There are many men who are married and have three daughters. There are even more who claim the honor of being a native Kansas Citian, a native Missourian.

But the number is small of those who, at an early age, adopted the philosophy of Nathaniel Hawthorne who told his mother:

"I don't want to be a doctor, and live by men's diseases; nor a minister to live by their sins; nor a lawyer to live by their quarrels. So I don't see there's anything left for me but to be an author."

Lew Larkin, a graduate of the University of Missouri School of Journalism and a working newspaperman for more than thirty years, is such a man. His first book was *Bingham: Fighting Artist*.

His second book has a lofty theme, "Missouri—Mother of the West." Indeed, the volume, *Vanguard of Empire*, substantiates Mr. Larkin's contention that Missouri contributed more than any other state in carving out the West.

Breaking from the news style which earns his bread and butter, Mr. Larkin soars his literary wings without hesitancy. Indeed, one fancies Mr. Larkin gives a little more beauty than reality would have shown:

"Big-eared, raw-boned mules strained the creaking harness lines almost to a breaking point and brayed at the sulphurous invectives heaped on them with each stinging lash of the whip."

"Burnt cusswords" seem more appropriate for the day than "sulphurous invectives," though 'tis true, Mr. Larkin rarely has the opportunity to use such bons mots in his other writing.

Pursuing his theme, Mr. Larkin sets 1821, year of Missouri statehood, as the "year of destiny" for Missouri—and the West. He traces Missouri's role with zest. He details in book form what has been explored often in phrase and paragraph: The achievement of men that spans almost a century, the achievement that was to make Missouri known as the "Show-Me State."

The author's appreciation of historical accuracy is evident, but the pains of his efforts to do well a difficult job sometimes show through. Organization leaves much to be desired. The topical approach gives the author too much leeway, too much temptation to take sidetrips into interesting but not always pertinent by-ways.

Author Larkin writes best in the chapters on Missouri's contribution to the exploration of Texas and the war with Mexico, though one might doubt the accuracy of Mr. Larkin's reporting when he writes:

"A Missourian stood atop the redoubt, legs spread wide apart, and fired into the Mexican ranks with a



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cool and measured monotony. John Rice of Jefferson City, the mildest-mannered man in the army, swung his gun butt with one hand, stabbed with the other and laughed fiendishly when splattered with blood."

But, doubtless, Mr. Larkin writes vividly in an I-was-there-and-you-can-be-too manner. It is an exciting tale of an exciting period in Missouri history and Mr. Larkin brings this to the fore. Truly, in 310 pages, he does include the most colorful and most important events in the story of the western role Missourians played in pioneering and developing.

Slowly and accurately researched and dramatically written—and one wonders how when Mr. Larkin acknowledges he arose at 3 o'clock every morning for three years to work on the book—*Vanguard of Empire* fills a valuable niche in the published history of Missouri.

Though some might say the book is bound to become an important reference source and could well become a classic of its kind, one would rather think, when the pages of *Vanguard of Empire* have been read and digested—and the eloquent chapters on the war with Mexico reread—that Mr. Larkin has discovered a gold mine not yet fully explored.

Vanguard of Empire can be more than the story of "Missouri—Mother of the West." It has the rare ingredients for a delightful historical novel, a truer vehicle for Mr. Larkin's superb capacity for catching the romance of the historical moment.

STUDENT HOUSING CRITICAL

Student housing will limit enrollments at the University this fall, and President Elmer Ellis again has called on residents of Columbia to make rooms available for rent to students if possible. He said all available rooms in University housing have already been assigned for the fall semester opening in September, and applicants are now being told they will be placed on a waiting list for possible cancellations.